

THE CLOCK IS TICKING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Madam Speaker, there are only 67 days left before we ring in the new year. Billions of people around the world will start to prepare to celebrate the first day of the year 2000 and, of course, I as many of my colleagues look forward to this day also. But this afternoon I am concerned about this next year with what all of us know as the Y2K problem, or millennium bug, the inability of many computer systems to process dates correctly beyond December 31, 1999. The problem results from computers programmed to process and use only the last two digits for the year field.

Madam Speaker, I am confident that Americans are well prepared and well ahead of the game when it comes to being ready for any possible glitches resulting from the Y2K. Congress has directed the Federal Government to go through billions and billions of lines of computer codes in order to make computers Y2K compliant. It is also Congress that has worked hand in hand with State and local governments to ensure that they have the necessary tools to function properly.

Congress, led by the majority here, is helping the private sector when it comes to the Y2K problem. We fought hard and have signed into law the Small Business Year 2000 Readiness Act, which directs the Small Business Administration to establish a loan guarantee program to address Y2K problems for small businesses. And it was, of course, this Republican Congress which successfully fought and passed the Year 2000 Readiness and Responsibility Act, setting limits on lawsuits against businesses and individuals for Y2K failures. But, Madam Speaker, my concerns are whether the rest of the world is ready.

Hearings within the last several weeks held in both the House and the Senate have raised some serious concerns. Many nations have done little, if anything, to combat the Y2K bug. These nations lack both the expertise and the funds to upgrade and convert their computer systems. Take, for example, the government of Indonesia, which is preparing for the possible Y2K malfunctions. Their National Electricity Board strategy is to watch what happens at midnight on January 1 in Australia and New Zealand, to use those 6 hours to develop and implement suddenly their Y2K plans. Now, this would be comical if it were not so serious and disturbing.

The worldwide ramifications of Y2K disturbances, of course, can have a domino effect. It is just not enough that the United States is prepared. Potential disruptions abroad caused by Y2K problems would impact millions of Americans who are living abroad, or who are traveling overseas. Though the

Central Intelligence Agency is confident that the Y2K computer failures overseas will not lead to accidental launch of ballistic missiles by any country, according to the testimony by the Central Intelligence Agency before the House Committee on International Affairs last week, nuclear power plants in nations such as Russia and the Ukraine could be susceptible to year 2000 malfunctions resulting from power grid failures.

Now, this is according to testimony presented by Lawrence Gershwin, National Intelligence Officer for Science and Technology for the CIA, and this is what he said, "In the worst case this could cause a meltdown and in some cases an accompanying release of radioactive fission gases." Furthermore, according to the CIA, Soviet power plants cannot even be tested for Y2K compliancy "given the age of the computer system and the fact that many of the original manufacturers have all gone out of business."

If the threat of another Chernobyl-like meltdown is not disturbing enough according to the CIA, there still remains the potential for Russia to misinterpret early warning data of ballistic missile launches resulting from the Y2K problem. That means during an international political crisis where tensions are already heightened, the Russians may misinterpret their missile data, leading them to believe and possibly to respond.

As a result, I am pleased to say the United States and Russia have set up a joint program to share information on their missile and space launches to prevent any misunderstanding resulting from any Y2K malfunctions.

I will not even begin in this short amount of time, Madam Speaker, to discuss all the possible problems with other countries not bringing their Y2K problem into compliance dealing with foreign energy and of course financial markets. I encourage other nations to expedite their conversions and look to the United States for leadership.

Madam Speaker, I encourage other nations to expedite their Y2K conversions before time runs out. Our Y2K compliance and success is not only contingent on the fact that this nation's computer and information systems function properly and smoothly, but also on the fact that we not feel side effects from disruptions in other countries.

REPUBLICAN CONGRESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Madam Speaker, I have the privilege of representing one of America's most diverse Congressional districts, representing the South Side of Chicago and the South Bushes, Cook and Will Counties, bedroom communities as well as farm towns and corn fields. When you represent such a

diverse district as city and suburbs and country, you learn to listen. You listen to the common message. One common message that we are hearing from back home is that we should be working together to solve the challenges that we face. As I look back as one of those who was elected in 1994 to come to Washington to change how Washington works, I am proud to say we have listened to that message and we have held together and we have held firm even those who said that we should not be doing what we are doing, those who opposed our efforts to balance the budget and cut taxes for the middle class, to reform the welfare system and also to restructure the IRS.

I am proud to say in the last 4½ years, this Republican Congress has made a big difference. Balancing the budget for the first time in 28 years, cutting taxes for the middle class for the first time in 16 years, reforming our welfare system for the first time in a generation, and for the first time ever, taming the tax collector by restructuring the IRS. Those are big accomplishments and much appreciated by the folks back home in Illinois but they tell me that's history now, what are you going to do next? They ask us to respond to the questions, the common concerns that we are often asked.

While Republicans are committed to strengthening our schools and strengthening Medicare and Social Security and paying down the national debt and, of course, lowering the tax burden, we also want to respond to some of those big concerns and big questions that I hear, whether at the union hall or the VFW, the Chamber of Commerce or down at a coffee shop on Main Street or a local grain elevator. That is one of those questions that the first question I often hear is a pretty basic one and, that is, when are you folks in Washington going to stop raiding the Social Security trust fund, when are you going to stop dipping into Social Security and spending Social Security on other things?

I am proud to say, Madam Speaker, that the Republicans in this Congress have made a commitment that for the first time since the 1960s when LBJ, President Johnson, began a bad habit that is hard to break in Washington, we are walling off the Social Security trust fund. This year is the first year that our budget has been balanced without dipping into Social Security. We want to continue that. That is why I am proud to say the Congressional Budget Office on September 30 of this year stated in a letter to Speaker HASTERT that the Republican balanced budget does not spend one dime of the Social Security trust fund. We are committed to stopping the raid on the Social Security trust fund.

I would also point out that with the Social Security Medicare lockbox that Republicans are proposing, we set aside \$200 billion more for Social Security and Medicare than the President's budget alone.